

VIETNAMESE AFFAIRS STAFF

OFFICE OF THE DIRECTOR OF CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE

DATE: 7 Sept. 73

TO: The Honorable James R. Schlesinger
The Secretary of Defense

FROM:

SUBJECT:

174-73

REMARKS:

Attached is a note to you from Bing West which you loaned to me in February or early March, shortly before Bing came down to see you. The note is undated but internal evidence indicates it was written and sent in December 1972 -- before Christmas but after your impending appointment as DCI had been announced. I have taken the liberty of making a copy since Bing has a number of useful ideas, but am returning the original to you.

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George A. Carver, Jr.
Special Assistant for Vietnamese Affairs

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Dr. James R. Schlesinger

[Redacted]

Dear Jim:

Congratulations on your new job. I'm sure John Finney was especially pleased! By the way, that was an excellent TV performance.

The purpose of this letter is to outline some of my views concerning an Indochina ceasefire, under the assumption that will be of particular and immediate interest to you.

I. Vietnam. Conceptually, we can talk of two wars; the main force and the control wars.

A. Main Force.

The main force confrontations between NVN and ARVN are undertaken by both sides for counterforce purposes, but with an asymmetry in strategic design. ARVN, aided by U.S. air and blockade operations, aims to attrite the NVA to a degree politically unacceptable in Hanoi. ARVN does not appear to have the political backing or physical force to go north and break the NVA. The NVA, however, appears to have at long last realized how stupid strategically they have been in playing the ARVN/U.S. attrition game. The NVA have a better strategic option than attrition. At less total cost, they can muster genuine offensives, whose aim is to destroy ARVN not by gradual attrition, but by a sudden

break. A dominant criterion for measuring the success of the NVA in breaking ARVN is the ratio of friendly killed to missing. In a good unit, it will be in excess of 20 - 1, even in a heated campaign. As it slips towards 1 - 1 parity, morale and leadership are unraveling. When it becomes worse - say, 1-2 or more - an army is on the verge of being broken.

B. The Control War

In the other war in South Vietnam, which is fought for control of the rural population, the Lao Dong Party has seen the VC attrited beyond comeback capability as a fighting force. Also, the days of political persuasion by harangue and social grievances are past. Death has driven away idealism. What is left is a blood feud with a Hatfield - Mc Coy vengeance as a prime motivation. Everybody has lost someone. There is going to be a winner and a loser in the village fights, and those who supported the losers of their own free will will not return home when the winner is declared.

The Lao Dong hope for resurgence in the Control War rests with the NVA main force and can occur in two ways. First, the NVA may turn on an offensive, before or after a ceasefire, which breaks or pushes back ARVN, leaving SVN Control War units, like the Popular Forces, exposed to main force attacks, creating an asymmetry which will persuade

the PF's to abandon their villages without a shot being fired. In other words, contrary to the pop guerrilla literature, guerrilla success in controlling the population will follow, not precede, counterforce victories.

Second, the Lao Dong could negotiate ceasefire terms which so deployed NVA forces that ARVN would feel compelled to redeploy as large blocking forces physically removed from the rural population. For instance, in 1971 there may have been 150 ARVN regular camps, mostly battalion size, and most located in heavily populated districts. In a ceasefire in 1973, by contrast, ARVN may consolidate to 50 camps of regimental size, most located in sparsely populated areas adjacent to supposed NVA camps. Given these dispositions, if clandestine NVA units then begin to work in concert with the local VC units against the PF's, then the Lao Dong may turn a successful end run around the ARVN line and begin to dominate the rural population.

In sum, if the NVA are allowed in a ceasefire to remain in the south, they have two options: another counterforce offensive or an end run. Recognition of these options by the population of SVN would in itself be destabilizing and weaken the long-run chances of the Saigon government.

Against that general background, I would like to offer a few thoughts concerning the role of intelligence in a ceasefire.

II. Intelligence

A. The Main Force War.

1. Location of Enemy Units. The high confidence we have in our capability over the mid to long term to locate enemy units should, I think, be tempered by our inability to track short-term fluctuations, lest we become lulled by our technological competence. For instance, John Ghaissen told me that at TeT 1968 the regularity of NVA transmissions from Cambodian base camps caused him and others to overlook less "hard" indicators of the nearly presence of those same units.

ARVN may deploy in reaction to what intelligence, which is subject to time and geographic errors, tells them of enemy deployments. This may be an incorrect use of intelligence. In a ceasefire, I think ARVN should deploy to thwart not the enemy location but rather the options which that location offers the enemy. I realize the above sentence is not self-evident and would be rejected by many military commanders. It is not a sound axiom for warfighting, since it concedes the initiative to the enemy. But viewed in the context and under the constraints of a ceasefire, when ARVN cannot, a priori, use intelligence to attack the enemy, than I believe that the rethinking of the ARVN deployment rationale is in order. This becomes intelligence business, at least to point out the error or to force an

explicit explanation of friendly deployments, since it is based on the misuse of intelligence information.

2. Intent of Enemy. I indicated that I think the NVA has two large options in a ceasefire: counterforce against ARVN or end runs against RF/PF units. Reinforcing both of these is the assurance their presence gives to all South Vietnamese that the war is not yet over.

3. Capabilities. To offset enemy options and to check his probing moves, we must know his strengths and his weaknesses. Only if he suffers worse than he inflicts will the enemy be deterred from militarily breaking the ceasefire. Apt SVN reprisal is probably the best guarantee of the ceasefire. "Apt" depends on intelligence, on gaming out move and countermove. The reprisal must hurt him, and he must perceive, wherever it takes place, that its motivation was a cause and effect relationship associated with his breaking the ceasefire. One may want, for instance, VC who are located but not touched until the VC or NVA do something somewhere else. This may be a bad example. It certainly could not be the normal SVN procedure. It may be too sophisticated or too academic. But in general I do think there should be an analysis of the concept of reprisal which indicates the enemy's strength, weaknesses and vulnerabilities and presents several escalation ladder options.

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B. The Control War.

1. Location. Here intelligence is of less utility and less reliability than in the Main Force War. A ceasefire agreement could conceivably restrict NVA and ARVN regular units to geographical confines, (with a net resultant benefit to the NVA because they could more easily evade the restriction and because ARVN would be decoupled from the rural population). But in the Control War the concept has little applicability. It can't be monitored or defined; both the Lao Dong and SVN claim the same rural communities. One could try restricting the size of local units. If that could be done, they would restrict their own movement. That is, each side would patrol that area it knew it controlled. And these boundaries are known throughout Vietnam on the local level. They are not static. They shift as one side gains confidence and reinforcements.

In a ceasefire, these boundaries may become more permanent. The SVN local forces, with local allegiances and without good national leaders, have no ideological incentive to gain suzerainty over neighboring hamlets. Irredentism, yes; patriotism, no. In contrast, the VC national leaders would push their local troops to march forward. Success in that direction, as I mentioned above, will rest on the capability of the NVA to reinforce them minus the capability of the SVN to undertake offsetting reprisals.

2. Monitoring. One man can know a district thoroughly and report facts accurately, if he wants to. The interpretation of the facts,* however, requires a standard. We have the data to prepare such standards for each village in each district in Vietnam. I'm not talking about confident point estimates, but rather about the overall trends - whether a district is becoming more secure for Saigon or for Hanoi. Many "experts" who have never fought in a village or who, like some reporters, possess a set of personal and institutional incentives which require the rejection of systematic inquiry, deny the validity of any data base concerning Vietnam. This is an absurd position but I mention it only because I believe you will hear persons, who assert they really "know" Vietnam, claiming one cannot quantitatively evaluate a ceasefire.

It seems to me that, in many critical areas, we can and must. To devise a simple but telling information system which is not subject to hopeless distortion is necessary when a ceasefire is to be monitored by persons of varying intelligence and ideology. There are certain facts concerning which men cannot lie or ignore free from detection, such as deaths, population movement, etc.

*By facts, I mean the physical evidence of violence or its results: indicators such as deaths, firefights, explosions, population migrations, minings, road traffic, etc.

3. The Urban Population. I have given the urbanites short shift because the possibility of a coup is low and without a coup, the critical roles will be played by the villagers, the militia and by ARVN. Yet you will probably receive a spate of reports dealing with urban politics, out of all proportion to the urban role in SVN's fight for life. The center of U.S. reporting is Saigon, so a proportionately skewed sample of the critical factors will result. This is reinforced by the tendency of all bureaucracies to have plump, posh middle-aged men at the fulcrums of staff power, where they lever reports and discussions to raise their particular strengths, which generally consist of the ability to talk urbanely with generals, sip coffee with various executive assistants and take fast helicopter rides. Their forte is to be "in" concerning the latest political gossip from Paris or Saigon. Now I'm not knocking that talent. There is utility in such knowledge.

My concern is with balance. There is a tendency, within as well as outside the U.S. Government, to ignore because it is unpleasant the fact that war is concerned with the killing of men because less violent means of achieving one's goals have failed. Given that achievement of goals in Vietnam is still unrealized by either side, the ceasefire is a continuation of the war with a less

visible and perhaps less absolute level of violence and death. So I would tend to concentrate on the Main Force and Control War aspects, although the nature and incentives of the persons involved in designing and negotiating the ceasefire terms may lead to a concentration upon the "political" (somehow removed from violence) aspects.

It is my hypothesis that the VC have been overrated as politicians. For all their penetrations of ARVN and Saigon circles, they have shown themselves inept and naive when offered large opportunities: The Buddhist uprising in I Corps in May of 1966; the fighting in the cities at Tet of 1968; the civilian abandonment of HUE in April of 1972. The VC are remarkably adept at applying effective rural violence but not at fomenting incipient urban anarchy.

III. Other thoughts.

A. Attrition.

One way or another, the concept of attrition as a warfighting strategy should be competently addressed and resolved. The ritualistic reporting of body counts continues to confuse, embitter or turn off officials who should know better but who have never thought the strategy through. You might recall the paper Nathan Leites and I wrote on this subject in 1967 which distinguished between absolute physical attrition (no able-bodied males left) and attrition of the political will to continue an offensive war,

given some level of casualties less than absolute. I think the concepts contained in that paper were valid, and are still not understood in Washington. But we lacked the NVN/VC data. Your organization has undertaken periodic attrition analyses aimed at short-term (6 mos.-1 yr.) prediction. I think it would be of benefit in sorting out our long-term expectations about Indochina to address the concept of attrition, its historical utility or disutility and what the data do or do not tell us, (confidence in the data, range of possible error, etc.)

B. Cambodia. Regrettably, I must stand by what I said at that SRG meeting a few years ago. The Cambodians do not fight; we have underrated the danger of a Cambodian guerrilla movement; and our military assistance concepts and selection of personnel is depressing.

I'll stop here. A Christmas card is on its way with the chatty news. If I can be of assistance to you or your staff, please let me know.

Best regards,



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